

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

This long-range plan is intended to provide guidelines and a structure for the Mansfield Commission On Aging as it carries out the following mandate:

1. To study the conditions and needs of elderly persons in relation to housing, economics, employment, health and nutrition, recreation, transportation and other matters.
2. To recommend and evaluate programs to meet the needs of the elderly and to suggest priorities for action.
3. To serve as a resource group to which Mansfield citizens could turn, either individually or as groups, when they have problems or questions about programs or needs of the elderly.
4. To furnish information outlining needs to agencies and groups who are interested in, or who provide services for the elderly.

This plan is also designed to be specific enough to provide direction and a basis for evaluation of ongoing initiatives. It is intended to be fluid and flexible to accommodate changing conditions and acquisition of new knowledge and information. The previous long-range plan covered the years 1994-2004, and upon reviewing this the Commission on Aging felt that the revised plan should cover a shorter period of time. Consequently, the plan contained in this document covers the period 2007-10, in the belief that rapidly changing conditions will require an update within the next three years. The group also agreed to incorporate strategies into the Long Range Plan that support realistically achievable and measurable objectives. It is the intent of the Commission to utilize this plan to agree upon priorities and to then identify strategies to achieve specific outcomes.

## **B. FRAMEWORK**

To accomplish the task of creating a long-range plan, the Commission On Aging decided to utilize the framework of a "senior friendly community". As the State of Connecticut's "State Plan on Aging" reports, "many of today's communities are not adequately equipped and "aging sensitive," to enable older people to remain in their communities with independence and choice. As their needs change, older adults must frequently either move out of their communities or make less than desirable adaptations." The concept of a "senior friendly" community was developed by the North Carolina Division of Aging as an element of their response to a growing demographic shift in their population. "A senior friendly community offers a wide range of social and economic supports for all citizens, including seniors; values seniors' contributions to the community; promotes positive intergenerational relations; considers the needs and interests of seniors in physical and community planning; respects and supports seniors' desire and efforts to live independently; and, acknowledging the primary role that families, friends and neighbors play in the lives of older adults, enhances their

capacity for caring.” The focus of senior-friendly community initiatives is individuals, neighborhoods, agencies, organizations and public and private programs that collaborate to remove barriers to services and opportunities and that improve the quality of life for older adults wherever they live.

A senior-friendly community identifies the following critical factors as elements of the community: Physical Environment, Health, Economy, Technology, Safety/Security, Social/Cultural Involvement, Services/Support, and Transportation, and then evaluates them along the following dimensions: Existence, Adequacy, Accessibility, Equity and Efficiency. The document that results from this evaluative process identifies assets, opportunities and areas for development.

### **C. POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

In developing this plan, it is important to take population projections and demographics into account. In 2004 the number of individuals age 65 and older represented 12.4 percent of the U.S. population. In Mansfield that figure is closer to 14%. By 2030, the number of people age 65 and older will reach 20 percent of the U.S. population, and in Mansfield it is projected that 22% of our population will fall into that group. Older persons who reached age 65 in 1998 could expect to live an additional 17.8 years; women could expect to live another 19.2 years and men another 16 years.

The largest growth rate of older Americans will occur during the next 30 years as the Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, reach age 60. Between 2006 and 2010 the first wave of Baby Boomers turn 60, which will contribute to a significant increase in Connecticut’s older adult population.

The Town of Mansfield certainly mirrors these population trends. The 2007 town profile from the Connecticut Economic Resource Center (CERC) indicates an 18% population increase in Mansfield since 2000, as opposed to a 4% rate of growth in the state overall. Projections are for a modest growth in population between now and the year 2011 (2.7%), which will continue to outpace population increases in the State of Connecticut (0.6%). It is clear that the population of Mansfield is growing, with a much larger percentage of our residents as ever before living longer and falling into the category of “seniors.”

### **D. SURVEY BACKGROUND:**

Members of the Commission on Aging felt that to be able to develop this plan it was important to solicit information from a broad spectrum of Mansfield’s senior residents. Using the outline of a “senior friendly” community, commission members created questions within each category. The intent was to survey both the awareness and interest of seniors in a wide range of programs, services, and areas of concern. Using the mailing list of registered Mansfield voters age 55 and older, the survey was then mailed to approximately 2700 residents with a self-

addressed stamped envelope, and 35% were returned. The secretary for the Social Service Department entered all survey responses and comments, and the results were then reviewed by members of the Commission on Aging to identify areas of critical importance. The following information reflects information received from the surveys, as well as other information obtained by commission members regarding programs and services.

#### **E. HEALTH CARE SERVICES:**

Connecticut's "Plan of Aging" indicates that there has been a growing appreciation for the fact that while old age may be a time of greater risk for declines in health and daily functions, it need not inevitably be associated with such negative outcomes. There has been an increased awareness that considerable numbers of older adults continue to enjoy relatively high levels of physical and cognitive functioning and remain actively engaged in various life pursuits well into their 70's, 80's and even 90's. Although considerable and needed attention is devoted to health and functioning problems that are most commonly experienced by older adults, aging is not uniformly associated with significant disease and disability.

In discussion, members of the Commission felt that there are a wide variety of health-related programs that are currently available in Mansfield, many of which are offered through our Senior/Wellness Center. The key question that arose was whether or not these services are fully utilized and adequate to meet the needs of our senior residents.

#### **Survey Findings:**

The following are key results of the survey in the area of healthcare:

- a. 65% of respondents indicated that they are very aware or somewhat aware of the healthcare services offered through the Senior Center. Comments indicated that there is disappointment that services offered through the Wellness Center have been reduced since Windham Hospital stopped delivering these services in 2003, and many would like to see geriatric services restored.
- Residents are aware to a large degree of the following healthcare services including the Visiting Nurse Association (78%), Exercise Classes ((69%), and blood pressure screening (59%).
- A very small percentage of respondents indicated a high likelihood of needing healthcare services in the next six months, with the highest percentage identifying immunization (39%).

#### **Proposed Action Steps/Recommendations:**

- Health promotion activities consisting of exercise, nutritional guidance and regular preventive physician visits must continue to be offered if they are to have a long term positive impact upon both health maintenance and cost containment of health care. These services also need to be well publicized.

- Policymakers need to consider ways to invest in disease prevention as a way to promote wellness in our older population.
- It appears that respondents were not likely to identify themselves as being in need of medical services, and health promotion efforts may need to focus on identifying risk factors.

#### **F. ECONOMY/FINANCIAL:**

Many older adults also live on low and fixed incomes. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, nearly 26,700 older adults in Connecticut live at or below the federal poverty level. In the Town of Mansfield 5.5% of residents age 65 and older live below the federal poverty level, which lags behind the 14% of our total population who live in poverty. While poverty does not appear to be a problem for many senior residents, rising property taxes and the cost of medical insurance do raise concerns for some.

The existing long-range plan identified the need to promote information on such programs as reverse mortgages, investments and insurance. In reviewing the current status of this effort it was noted that the Sparks newsletter makes information available, as well as local publications like the Willimantic Chronicle, WAM Horizons, and the Town of Mansfield Annual Calendar/Report. A question was raised as to how residents get information about available services (such as fee waivers), and what help the Town may be able to provide along these lines. It was also noted that there is a need for information about volunteer conservatorship training. Tax preparation assistance and legal service representation is currently offered at the Senior Center.

**Survey Findings:** This did not appear to be an area of great concern. 67% of respondents felt that it was highly unlikely that they would have a need for job training, and there were similar responses regarding conservatorship, estate planning, financial planning and reverse annuity mortgages.

#### **Proposed Action Steps/Recommendations:**

- Review the need for assisting “land rich” elderly.
- Reach out proactively to individuals who may qualify for subsidized services.
- Offer periodic education on issues such as estate planning and reverse annuity mortgages.

#### **G. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT/HOUSING**

The existing long-range plan identified the need to inform residents about housing options and to possibly explore shared housing programs and the impact of younger disabled residents in senior housing facilities. The general feeling was that residents are very familiar with Wright’s Village and Juniper Hill, and that there appears to be a wide range of housing needs for seniors, based on service needs, income, and other factors.

One area of significant interest has been the possible development of an assisted living facility in this community. Mansfield is an attractive place for senior and older adults to reside, and the town has a strong interest in encouraging senior residential options and opportunities beyond what the community currently has to offer. In 2005 the Town of Mansfield contracted with Brecht Associates of Philadelphia, PA to conduct a market feasibility study to determine whether or not the local area could support the location of an assisted living community or related senior housing options. That study indicated that based on qualitative interviews, site analysis, and results of the demand analyses for active adult, independent and assisted living, the conditions are favorable for the development of such projects. Early in 2007 the Mansfield Town Council passed a resolution in which they indicated their interest in recruiting and selecting a qualified developer to construct and operate an independent/assisted living facility within the Town of Mansfield. The resolution provides for the formation of an advisory committee to release an RFQ, develop a "short list" of developers, develop and release an RFP, and to refer a qualified developer to the Town Council who will select a preferred developer for the project. The Town will assist the preferred developer in identifying and acquiring an appropriate site for the project. Preliminary work has already taken place regarding identification of land with access to university sewer and water. At this point, the town sees itself only as a potential facilitator, and not a developer, of an Independent/Assisted living project in Mansfield.

**Survey Findings:** While a large percentage of respondents indicated that they are familiar with the range of housing options available in Mansfield, more than 60% indicated that it is highly unlikely that they will move to one of these facilities in the next six months. 43% indicated that it is very likely that they will remain in their homes with no services. These responses are in contrast to comments made later in the survey indicating a need for assisted living services.

**Proposed Action Steps/Recommendations:**

- Continue to support the work of the Assisted/Independent Living Advisory Committee.
- Make seniors aware of the range of housing options and services available to residents.
- Support the concept of a continuum of care available to seniors.

## **H. TECHNOLOGY**

The existing long-range plan does not specifically address the area of technology. It should be noted that since 1994 there have been huge strides made in the development and use of technology that is utilized by seniors in many areas of their lives. There is now a well-equipped computer lab at the Senior Center, along with community computers available in the Senior Center, the library and the Community Center. The computers in the Center's computer lab have built-in assistive and adaptive programs for people with disabilities, including a program that can read text aloud. The question of the availability of assistive technology in the Town Hall for hearing impaired was raised, and needs to be explored.

further, along with TTY listening technology. The recommendation was also made to assist in making free cell phones available for 911 use.

**Survey Findings:** It should be noted that 32% of respondents are aware of the town's website

**Proposed Action Steps:** support the implementation of *MySeniorCenter* as a registration and data management system for the Mansfield Senior Center.

## **I. SAFETY & SECURITY**

The existing long-range plan identified the following priority issues in this area: improved communications regarding existing safety programs, promotion of the use of cell phones, ongoing presentations on safety and security issues, and support for sidewalk construction and maintenance. The feeling was that these items are still relevant and should be incorporated into the revised plan. This was not borne out by the results of the survey.

**Survey Findings:** 96% are not aware of victims of abuse, neglect or domestic violence, 88% deny any need for an emergency response device, 91% are not aware of any victims of fraud or exploitation.

**Proposed Action Steps/Recommendations:**

- Support for volunteer training to supply telephone reassurance to homebound seniors.
- Offer periodic presentations on strategies and programs for protecting assets.

## **J. SOCIAL & CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT**

The existing plan urges advocacy for expansion of Senior Center programs that offer social, recreational, and educational opportunities to all seniors in Town, and expansion of outreach services to seniors who rely on assistance for transportation. The feeling is that there are currently many opportunities in town for volunteerism, intergenerational activities, lifelong learning, and spiritual growth. It was also felt that this community provides ample opportunities for volunteerism, is sensitive to individuals who have disabilities, that information about programs is well-publicized, and that our community encourages an appreciation for racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity. There is also a feeling that more needs to be done to make these opportunities available to seniors who are confined to their homes. This could include promoting the use of programs such as the Senior Connections conference call programs, or developing a network of craft tutors who would make home visits. As with many of these areas, the issue of transportation comes up as both an obstacle and also an area needing additional support.

**Survey Findings:** only 3% feel that there are not sufficient opportunities for volunteerism, only 9% are not able to take advantage of social and cultural activities. Transportation was identified as a potential obstacle.

**Proposed Action Steps:**

- Continue to include transportation as an element of social/cultural activities.
- Continue to offer reduced cost tickets to events at Jorgensen and other cultural venues.

**K. SERVICES & SUPPORT**

The area of Services & Support is incorporated into several areas of the existing plan, and tends to cross many lines. This primarily refers to a wide range of programs and services that are designed specifically to meet the needs of seniors. When talking about this area, how to get information out to seniors is a critical question. One suggestion was to use the Sparks newsletter to feature one service on a monthly basis. The publication "At Your Fingertips" was also mentioned as a useful tool, although it needs to be updated. The general feeling is that there are multiple sources of information, including: the Social Services Department, the Library, and the internet. A suggestion was made that there be one phone number identified as the primary source for people to call for Information & Assistance, and the consensus was that this is an appropriate role for the Senior Service Social Worker. Other suggestions included use of the Town Calendar and Infoline.

**Survey Findings:** 62% receive information from Sparks, 43% from WAM Horizons, and 32% from [www.mansfieldct.org](http://www.mansfieldct.org).

**Proposed Action Steps:**

- Continue to utilize Sparks as a key source of information.
- Update "At Your Fingertips."
- Provide help with understanding and finding the full range of in-home and community options available to support continued independence and quality of life.

**L. TRANSPORTATION**

The issue of transportation tends to cross many lines, as it often impacts on the issue of accessibility to programs and services. Reliable and dependable transportation is critical to helping community members remain healthy, productive individuals. Older adults rely on the automobile as their primary mode of transportation. More than 80 percent of Connecticut's adults' ages 65 and older have active driver's licenses. Many know, however, that at some point changes in vision, hearing, reaction time and other related conditions or illnesses could affect their ability to safely drive. Transportation is important in helping many older adults make crucial connections, but in many locations especially in rural regions such as Mansfield it is often lacking or even nonexistent.

The existing long-range plan identified specific road improvements to be made in town, along with supporting transportation alternatives and the use of Dial-A-Ride services. In reviewing accomplishments of this plan, there was a general feeling that it is difficult to recruit and retrain volunteer drivers. There is currently

a Regional Transportation Plan in place that identifies all plans and priorities for all transportation initiatives in Mansfield, and this needs to be incorporated into this long-range plan, along with the results of studies that have been done on transportation. One suggestion was to look at use of the town's Transportation Advisory Committee as a resource in this area.

**Survey Findings:** 88% of respondents drive their own car, 55% ride with a spouse or other family member, and 57% indicate that it is highly unlikely that they would use Dial-A-Ride services.

**Proposed Action Steps:**

- Continue to support and promote the use of Dial-A-Ride.
- Explore additional transportation options.
- Offer services to promote safe driving and driver evaluation.

**M. SUMMARY**

Mansfield is clearly a town that is attractive to seniors and has much to offer. The responses to the survey indicated that while there are some areas of concern, in general seniors seem to appreciate the range of programs and services that are available, and take full advantage of them. It will be the work of the Commission on Aging in subsequent months to identify specific areas of concern, prioritize issues, and develop an action plan for the commission. It is our hopes that in doing this we will continue to maintain Mansfield's reputation as a desirable residence for all ages.